SF Chronicle

GAO Study On Gifts To Nixon

MAR 28 1975

By Maxine Cheshire
Washington Post

Washington

The General Accounting Office, after nearly a year's investigation, has issued a report that could enable former President Nixon and his family to keep all valuable foreign gifts received by them while he was in the White House.

These gifts, 824 from foreign government officials worth at least $2 million and 2632 more of unknown value from private foreign donors, include jewels, paintings, objects of gold and silver, rare porcelains, antique furniture, and other works of art.

Some are in storage here with the General Services Administration, others are in San Clemente and elsewhere.

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The GAO, in a 66-page study of the way the Foreign Gifts and Decorations Act of 1966 is administered in all branches of government, asserts that the present legislation is too "vague."

It is so vague, the GAO said, that any attempt to impose a penalty for its violation would be vulnerable to legal challenge.

The 1966 act, aimed at barring foreign largesse to U.S. officials and their families, specifies that all gifts valued at more than $50 from "kings, princes or foreign states" are legally the property of the U.S. government and must be turned over to the Chief of Protocol's office.

Only gifts from foreign officials fall under the 1966 act.

Mr. Nixon's "private" foreign gifts—those from persons not officially connected at the time with foreign governments—here ruled exempt from the act last fall by White House and State Department legal counsel.